2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

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PLATE IV

A dispute in settlement at Chiwalo's hut. The assessor is sitting under the veranda behind the pole. A village headman can just be discerned in the shade under the veranda. The commoners sit in the sun.

(*October 1948*)

[facing p. 56]

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

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PLATE V

Village headman, Nyenje, at his installation ceremony. He is not entitled to wear a scarlet headband but wears a coloured one instead. On his right sits his sister, on his left his wives, adopting the posture correct for an initiand—head bowed, eyes downcast, hands in the lap. A villager is dropping a penny into the cloth at the headman's feet while the headman's representative collects the pennies.

(*July 1947*)

[facing p. 114]

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

vomited human flesh.[1] They said that they had a strong headman and that they could trust him; he was a good headman without witchcraft. If he had been a sorcerer they would have kept scolding him until the next morning.

About two hours after sunrise the people gathered and started dancing. At about this time Cimombo was brought out of the hut and put in the grass shed which had been built for the occasion. This was the climax of the ceremony.[2] He sat on a chair in the grass shed with one of his two wives on either side. Makoka then started a chant, exhorting the visitors to come to throw pennies at Cimombo's feet. Some of the people there made speeches about the type of behaviour they would expect from him. Then Nyambi arrived from the court village in a ricksha. When the noise had subsided he told the people that if they disobeyed Cimombo it meant that they disobeyed the chief. He emphatized the importance of the rank of the new headman. After the speech he presented 12*s.* to Cimombo which was received on his behalf by Ncimbo. Nyambi then left and the ceremony was over, but the people remained to dance and drink beer.

This description of the procedure following the 'coming out of the hut' is somewhat sketchy. The interaction of the headman and his villagers on this formal and ceremonial occasion is of great interest and importance. During the entire ceremony the headman adopts the pose which is appropriate for any Yao initiand. His hands are on his lap or on the arms of the chair and his head is bowed forward with eyes downcast. He neither speaks nor moves. His attendants, when necessary, wipe the sweat off his face or chase away the flies. The other occupants of the mat, who may be his wives, and sometimes his heir, adopt similar postures. In contrast to this, is the behaviour of the villagers who run about shouting wildly, the men discharging muzzle-loading guns, and women ululating in the typical Central African way.

Before the new headman comes out of the hut his mentors

[1] This is a test based on the witchlore of the Yao, who believe that sorcerers kill relatives with magic and then share out the flesh of their victims with fellow sorcerers in ghoulish feasts.

[2] Called the 'coming out from the hut' (*kulupoka nyumba*). It is of course the first public appearance of the headman in his newly assumed status.

769 A man leaving his village on some expedition and wishing to be assured of safe conduct
484 will procure some millet flour. Going quietly into his house, he squats down in one corner
787 and gently sifts the flour through his hand so that it falls on the floor in the form of a little cone, repeating as he does so, his prayer for safe conduct beginning and ending with the word *chenshi!* please!

[539] "*Chenshi! chenshi!* wa-ku-mulonga ondaga ndimupanga mono panga ndilonse
"Please, please! those at above ancestor clear eyes mine that I may see
kinda, ngaisha *chamono kangaja, chenshi! chenshi! chenshi!*"
the path, may I arrive well where I go, *please, please, please!*"

He then covers the cone of flour with a basket. On the morrow, he will uncover it to see what has happened. According as the cone has remained intact or has fallen to one side or the other, the omen indicates whether or not the journey should be undertaken, the reaction being caused by the spirits to whom his supplication was addressed.

769 Again, there may have occurred much sickness in a village and the people conclude that the pest has come to remind them that they have not been attentive to their deceased chief. "His grave-house in the village has been allowed to fall into decay," and so on. They will decide that his spirit must be propitiated. The grave-house is rebuilt, a pot is sunk in the ground, and beer is poured in, and round about heaps of flour are placed. Prayer is made to the chief at whose grave they are worshipping, supplicating him in person and "all others who are with you at *Mlonya*," asking that he will no longer cause ill to befall the village.

When a village is moved, the beer-pot from the grave of the old chief is taken to the new village and a ceremony similar to that just described takes place, with the prayer that he will come to the new village and continue to exercise his benevolent care over its people.

731 In 1880 when there was a threatened famine on account of long drought in Zomba district, Malemya decided that supplication for rain must be made to the spirits of his illustrious predecessors. Kasunga, one of Malemya's wise men, acted as high priest. A large amount of beer was brewed and the night before the ceremony, twenty sheep and fifty goats were slaughtered. Plates of the meat, of rice and porridge were then placed on the ground round the grave-house of the old Malemya, and pots of beer set into the ground at intervals. At the head of the grave, little heaps of millet flour were arranged. This flour had been prepared by each of Malemya's wives as were [illegible] over a menstrual period. The following morning, a fence was built round the grave, outside which all the people collected, while beyond them again was a second fence. Kasunga, accompanied by an assistant then appeared, and amid absolute silence entered the inner enclosure. He addressed to the old Malemya, at whose grave they were all assembled, a prayer for rain. He then repeated the prayer, invoking the aid of all the past line of chiefs down to the reigning Malemya, repeating their names. Returning to the outer enclosure, he again uttered the prayers, all the assembled multitude repeating them after him while lying [illegible], resting on their

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

knees and elbows, at intervals swaying their bodies from side to side and clapping their hands. Kasanga then ordered all to go and bathe, men and women separately. As they returned from the stream, rain began to fall.

Intercession on behalf of the sick may be made, separately by anyone who is likely to be accused of causing the illness by witchcraft.[1] The man standing with arms outstretched, downwards and a little in front of his body, the hands supine, takes some water in his mouth and discharges it in a stream on the ground, (probably as a sign of purification of his tongue), and then invoking "all the spirits above," asks that they will intercede to restore health to the sick man and bear witness to his own innocence of any wish to do the sick man injury. *Ku-pepa* is the word meaning to offer sacrifice and prayer.

Harvesting and hunting are occasions when sacrifices may be offered. It was formerly the custom for the chief to determine the day on which harvesting of millet should begin. On the day appointed, a big drum was beaten in the village and word passed round; then everyone would go down to his garden, gather a head of millet, and bring it back to the village where it was all handed over to the chief's headwife. After drying and thrashing, a little of the grain was laid at the grave of an old chief by one of the reigning chief's advisers, the remainder being again distributed to all the people gathered together in the village meeting-place, who ate it raw. After this ceremony, harvesting began.

In passing through a millet garden, if a child asks his mother to give him some to eat, she plucks a bunch or two and reverently lays one at the foot of a *mavo* tree for the spirits or at the base of some other tree, if she cannot see a *mavo*, she gives the rest to the child.

When a hunting expedition makes its first killing, part of the flesh of the animal is laid at the base of a tree as a thank offering to the spirits and in anticipation of further favors to be conferred. All such offerings are supposed by the natives to be partaken of by the spirits, though they are well aware that they do not actually diminish in quantity. There is an interesting point in this connection: any man who has acted as *mbiki* (undertaker) to some well-known man may appropriate these offerings. In the case of the hunting offering, he will run round the tree, saying, "I am a hyaena, the spirits will not mind me," and will then take part of the flesh-offering and eat it.

In the same way, a *mbiki* may drink from a grave beer-pot after three days, when the spirits are supposed to have taken what they want.

With the exception of the *mavo* tree above mentioned (*mlimo*, Chin.), and possibly another called *mulo-mpanu* (Chin.), which is never used as firewood and which is supposed to be used by *mzimu*, I do not think there are any sacred trees properly so-called. Miss Werner supposes that many of the big trees (often a species of *Ficus*) in villages are sacred.[2] The truth is, I believe, simply that a village is made naturally round a big tree which conveniently offers its shade for the village meeting place. The spirits of deceased chiefs may

[1] Vide supra, p. 316.

[2] The natives of British Central Africa, op. cit., p. 62.

3: Stanmore D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT? Tao FT?

Chindindo: the *chindindo* songs are the favorites among all the *akhar* people. They have been in late years partly replaced by others, but, at the present time, there is a tendency to return to them; they are staid in tone and the dance is sedate. *Chindindo* is always played at mournings. While the whole company sits around in a circle with the drums at one side, a couple of people do the dancing in the middle. The drums used are a *chingonge*, two *ichomo*, and a *likuti*. With the commencement of drumming, a man well known for his songs steps out into the middle and begins singing; he is followed by another man or maybe a woman who sings a second part; the two singers are generally people who have found that they sing well together. Two such people will be welcomed, and they may sing many songs, while any young upstarts who do not sing well together, will be given to understand that their performance does not meet with approval. People have their favorite songs, and there may be much heart-burning if an old man finds some one else singing a song that he considers especially his own. As they sing, they dance their peculiar shuffling steps. (The words of some of these songs are given later.)

535

Sukuyo: an Angoni dance sometimes danced by the Yao. It resembles *chindindo* in that all sit singing and clapping while, one at a time, men dance in the open space to time given by bamboo sticks knocked together. The songs are all hunting songs.

It is impossible to describe the steps used in all the dances; for each dance, they differ, of course, and except by a cinematograph film, they cannot be reproduced. The movements of the feet are ordinary stepping motions or patting of the ground with the foot, the actual movements being very small, so that in most cases it is impossible to devise any means of making out the steps. To enable them to perform these steps, they commonly dance with the knees bent, the buttocks protruded behind, and the back arched. In some cases, this attitude is extreme.

[52]

There is a large series of dances which, to the uninitiated spectator, appear to resemble each other very closely. The general plan of the dance is as follows. The drums are placed in the middle; around them in a circle are the dancers and outside them, the onlookers. The circle may be thirty or forty strong, composed of men only or of men and women as the case may be. Commonly, the ring of dancers is divided into two halves, each half being headed by a leader who sings the song, all joining in the refrain, while the onlookers do the clapping. When the drums begin, they all walk round in a circle, but at a given signal, one of the drums gives out a new time, and the whole circle starts dancing with short, shuffling movements already described, usually progressing in the circle, sometimes going backwards, sometimes facing the drums or turning right around in the line.

[77]

M'kwanda is a dance of, I believe, recent introduction which has replaced to some extent *chindindo*, much to the disgust of the older people who dislike the innovation. They shake their heads and say, "*Chilowoko chinsanku!*" "The world is finished." The drums used are *likuti*, *ulipatipa*, *mukuru*, and *chingonge*. It is danced by men and females only.

Kjondo or, as it was known some years ago, *ngwandoli*, is danced like *mkwanda*, but the

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[End Plate 1.]